AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1.   (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

   associating one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users

      of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

      representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

   deriving ~~one or more community ratings~~ a community rating uniquely

      corresponding to a particular user by ~~aggregating~~ utilizing an aggregation

      of the one or more characteristic values associated with the particular user

      and the one or more characteristic values associated with each user of the

      plurality of users sponsored to the online trading community by the

      particular user.

2.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the online trading

   community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a

   network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying

   or selling of goods or services.

3.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the network comprises the

   Internet.

4.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more

   characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback concerning the

   particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic

   community.

5.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 4, wherein the other users of the

   plurality of users comprise users that have previously traded with the particular

   user.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein the sponsorship relationships of the plurality of users are represented as the relationship tree including one or more n-ary trees.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the sponsorship relationships between the plurality of users is stored in a data structure for each user of the plurality of users.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular user contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was sponsored by the particular user.

10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the deriving of the ~~one or more~~ community ~~ratings~~ rating for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.

11. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the ~~one or more~~ community ~~ratings~~ rating and the one or more characteristic values comprise ~~numerical values~~ one or more of the following: alphabetic values, numeric values, alpha-numeric values, symbolic values, and graphic values..

Claims 12-13 (Cancelled)

14. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users

of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

derive ~~one or more~~ a community ~~ratings~~ rating uniquely corresponding to a

particular user by ~~aggregating~~ utilizing an aggregation of the one or more

characteristic values associated with the particular user and the one or

more characteristic values associated with each user of the plurality of

users sponsored to the online trading community by the particular user.

15. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the

online trading community comprises an electronic community buying and selling

of merchandise over a network, the merchandise having at least one of goods and

services.

16. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the

one or more characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback

concerning the particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in

the electronic community.

17. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the

sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the

machine to maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users,

the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user

and any user of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

18. Claims 18–20 (Cancelled)

21. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the ~~one or more~~ the

community ~~ratings~~ rating for the particular user represent a reputation value

corresponding to the particular user.

22.   (Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

associating a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users

within an online trading community, the first characteristic value being

obtained for the first user utilizing a first feedback value based on

feedback received concerning the first user from other users of the

plurality of users;

associating a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of

users, wherein the second user is sponsored to the online trading

community by the first user, the second characteristic value being obtained

for the second user utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback

received concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of

users; and

deriving a first community rating for the first user by ~~aggregating~~ utilizing an

aggregation of the first characteristic value and the second characteristic

value.

23.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 22, further comprising:

associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users,

wherein the third user is sponsored to the online trading community by the

second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by

utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the

third user from other users of the plurality of users; and

deriving a second community rating for the second user by ~~aggregating~~ utilizing

an aggregation of the second characteristic value and the third

characteristic value.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the second user as a lineal descendent of the first user.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the third user as a lineal descendant of the second user.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24, wherein the relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users sponsored by at least one of the first user and the second user.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

28. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users within an online trading community, the first characteristic value is obtained for the first user by utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback received concerning the first user from other users of the plurality of users;

associate a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of users,

wherein the second user is sponsored to the online trading community by the first user, the second characteristic value is obtained for the second user by utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback received concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of users; and deriving a first community rating for the first user by ~~aggregating~~ utilizing an aggregation of the first characteristic value and the second characteristic value.

29.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the second user as a lineal descendent of the first user.

30.   (Cancelled)

31.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users sponsored by at least one of the first user and the second user.

32.   (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

33.   (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:

a first storage medium; and

a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users

of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

representing an individual rating associated with each user, and

derive ~~one or more~~ a community ~~ratings~~ rating uniquely corresponding to a

particular user by ~~aggregating~~ utilizing an aggregation of the one or more

characteristic values associated with the particular user and the one or

more characteristic values associated with each user of the plurality of

users sponsored to the online trading community by the particular user.

34.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, further comprising:

a second storage medium; and

a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first

computer via a network interface, the second computer to

receive feedback concerning the particular user from other users of the plurality of

users,

generate a feedback value corresponding to the particular user based on the

feedback, and

transmit the feedback value to the first computer.

35.   (Currently Amended) The system of claim 34, wherein the first computer

comprises a server computer and the second computer comprises a client

computer ~~including viewing computer~~.

36.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is

further to maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users,

the relationship tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user

and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

37.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is

further to determine the one or more characteristic values based on the feedback value corresponding to the particular user.

38. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the second computer is accessed by the plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

39. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the network interface is to couple the first computer with the second computer over a network having the Internet.

40. (Currently Amended) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to:

associate a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein the third user is sponsored to the online trading community by the second user, the third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of the plurality of users; and

derive a second community rating for the second user by aggregating utilizing an aggregation of the second characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

41. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 40, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the plurality of users, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the third user as a lineal descendent of the second user.

42. (New) A method, comprising:

associating one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

determining a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by utilizing one or more of the following: (1) one or more characteristic values associated with the particular user, (2) one or more characteristic values associated with each user of the plurality of users sponsored to the online trading community by the particular user, (3) one or more characteristic values associated with each user sponsored to the online trading community by each sponsored user of the particular user, and (4) a number of users sponsored to the online community by the particular user.

43. (New) The method of claim 42, further comprising associating the community rating to the particular user.

44. (New) The method of claim 42, wherein the online trading community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying or selling of goods or services.

45. (New) The method of claim 42, further comprising maintaining a relationship tree between the particular user, each user sponsored to the online trading community by the particular user, and each user sponsored to the online trading community by each sponsored user of the particular user.

46. (New) The method of claim 42, wherein the determining of the community rating for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.

47.	(New) The method of claim 42, wherein the one or more characteristic values and the community rating comprise one or more of the following: alphabetic values, numeric values, alpha-numeric values, symbolic values, and graphic values.

48.	(New) A system, comprising:

a first storage medium; and

a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to

associating one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

determining a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by utilizing one or more of the following: (1) one or more characteristic values associated with the particular user, (2) one or more characteristic values associated with each user of the plurality of users sponsored to the online trading community by the particular user, (3) one or more characteristic values associated with each user sponsored to the online trading community by each sponsored user of the particular user, and (4) a number of users sponsored to the online community by the particular user.

49.	(New) The system of claim 48, further comprising:

a second storage medium; and

a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first computer via a network interface, the second computer to receive feedback concerning the particular user from other users of the

plurality of users,

generate a feedback value corresponding to the particular user based on

the feedback, and

transmit the feedback value to the first computer.

50. (New) The system of claim 49, wherein the first computer comprises a server computer and the second computer comprises a client computer.

51. (New) The system of claim 48, wherein the first computer is further to

associate the community rating to the particular user; and

maintain a relationship tree between the particular user, each user sponsored to

the online trading community by the particular user, and each user

sponsored to the online trading community by each sponsored user of the

particular user.

52. (New) The system of claim 48, wherein the first computer is further to perform a recursive routine when determining the community rating for the particular user.

53 (New) The system of claim 48, wherein the one or more characteristic values and the community rating comprise one or more of the following: alphabetic values, numeric values, alpha-numeric values, symbolic values, and graphic values.

54. (New) The system of claim 49, wherein the second computer is accessed by the plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

55. (New) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of

an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values

representing an individual rating associated with each user; and

determine a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by

utilizing one or more of the following: (1) one or more characteristic

values associated with the particular user, (2) one or more characteristic

values associated with each user of the plurality of users sponsored to the

online trading community by the particular user, (3) one or more

characteristic values associated with each user sponsored to the online

trading community by each sponsored user of the particular user, and (4) a

number of users sponsored to the online community by the particular user.

56. (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of instruction

which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to associate the

community rating to the particular user.

57. (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the online trading

community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a

network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying

or selling of goods or services.

58. (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of instruction

which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a

relationship tree between the particular user, each user sponsored to the online

trading community by the particular user, and each user sponsored to the online

trading community by each sponsored user of the particular user.

59. (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of instruction

which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to perform a

recursive routing when determining of the community rating for the particular

user.